



## OUR CHEFS

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### EXECUTIVE CHEF James Martin

James Martin is the Chef/Owner/General Manager of *85 Main* in Putnam, CT established in June 2005. *85 Main* utilizes the highest quality local and organic ingredients as the basis of an eclectic fusion-style menu that includes a raw bar and a sushi bar in rural Northeastern Connecticut. James is an accomplished self-taught chef with a career full of highlights. James is driven by his desire to challenge the norm, educate the consumer, beat the odds, and exceed expectations. By staying true to himself and by not compromising his offer, he has earned the support of his small-town community and beyond. James and *85 Main* have become a catalyst in the revitalization of Downtown Putnam and its new identity as a cultural and culinary destination. His career in the restaurant industry has included a diversity of experiences that culminate into who he is today.

In 1999, James helped open *The Back Eddy*, a 250-seat restaurant with two-time James Beard Award recipient Boston Chef Chris Schlesinger ("The Grill King"). The high expectation of a celebrity chef's reputation was an intense education. James was able to discover what inspired him in the kitchen. Through experimentation using high-quality ingredients and unconventional flavors, he developed a passion for artistically driven menus.

In 2002, as the Chef and Manager of *The Vanilla Bean Café*, James led a team of chefs for the catering of Coca Cola's 117<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in Manhattan for over 2000 guests. While at the Café, James was able to develop a business plan for his own establishment.

In 2004 James ventured to Sarasota, Florida to put his plan into effect. After his primary restaurant deal fell through, James was faced with defeat. He consulted with numerous restaurants until he created the opportunity to return to New England as an independent restaurateur. Having the support of family and being able to raise his children in the same environment that influenced him became the priority.

In 2005 James turned back to his roots in the Putnam area to establish *85 Main*, partnering with Brian and Barry Jessurun of *The Vanilla Bean Café*. They subsequently set the bar high in the "Quiet Corner", earmarking the region as a culinary destination and giving *85 Main* an ongoing reputation of excellence and innovation.

James believes his culinary style is a combination of both past and present. Food is in his blood. He has a life-long history with food and the sourcing of quality ingredients. From a young age he has had a true love for New England's indigenous fare. Whether it was spearfishing or clamming on the Cape or throughout the Rhode Island coast, he developed knowledge for seafood and shellfish quality and freshness. While his grandfather hunted and fished, his Swedish grandmother taught him the significance of utilizing every last bit of the animal. By working to utilize the whole animal in creative ways (especially in this economy) James has introduced the public to a different caliber of comfort food. He is able to rethink the execution and ingredients of conventional dishes while still maintaining the integrity and history of the dish.

In his formative years, James learned to value the process of agriculture from both grandparents. On his grandfather's local farm he tended asparagus beds and maintained crops and he built irrigation for his uncle's sustainable farm in Virginia. Working with the vegetables and the land gave him a better appreciation for the delicacy of the harvesting process. This helped James to source the kind of



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ingredients on which he would build his menus, with a farmer's pride. James used his understanding of the process to help educate others on how to build relationships with farmers. Since 1999 he has shared his passion and knowledge of sourcing and has helped to bridge the gap locally with the "Farm to Table" movement.

*85 Main's* menu is a cross-section of many tastes and cultural influences from around the globe. Some are cutting edge, some are traditional—all emphasize consistency and quality utilizing fresh, unprocessed, organic, locally grown food as often as possible and in artistically driven ways. The focus is on clean food with unique flavor combinations regardless of the ingredient's origin. James' creativity is not limited by geographic location. He incorporates flavor profiles from around the world into unexpected and harmonious dishes. Even more, everything is made to order.

In addition to an extensive main menu, James executes a daily specials menu which affords him creative license with seasonal ingredients that inspire him in different ways. 46% of dinner sales are from this chalkboard-style menu. This proves that his clientele trust that his specials are *truly* special. It also indicates that their tastes are becoming more adventurous.

*85 Main* has been honored with numerous awards and accolades, attracting diners from nearby cities such as Hartford, Providence, and Worcester. James has been awarded with numerous Connecticut Magazine Awards, including *Best Macaroni and Cheese in CT*, *Best Sushi*, *Best Outdoor Dining*, *Best Continental*, *Best Seafood*, and *Best Bar* all in Windham County, and the runner-up for *Best Bar in the State of CT*. Only two years after opening *85 Main*, the producer of the popular Emmy Award-winning Bravo TV series *Top Chef* offered James a spot on the show. James respectfully declined, choosing to retain the independence and individuality often compromised by TV network demands.

As an independent restaurant in the wake of an unforgiving economic climate, *85 Main* has surpassed industry standards and national trends by increasing business 62% over the past two years. This favorable statistic speaks to James' team-building skills, hard work, and talent which have proven to be a driving force in *85 Main's* success. James and his partners also orchestrated the addition of an outdoor patio, a major bar expansion and a high-end sushi bar, adding to the restaurant's rapid growth. By refusing to compromise quality and consistency despite the downward economy and rising costs, James and *85 Main* have established themselves and earned wide respect.

James' professional accomplishments include catering to celebrity clientele and charitable events, restaurant consulting, creating restaurant business plans, menu design and consultation, and kitchen design for numerous establishments. With his extensive knowledge of oysters and shellfish, Martin has brought something new and exciting to the region with his creation of the *85 Main Shuck-Off*, an oyster shucking competition and celebration. It recently drew more than 5000 attendees and has arguably become the fastest-growing oyster event on the East Coast. Since its inception, James has emceed for the *Boston Seafood Show's Oyster Shucking Competition* as well as the *Mohegan Sun WineFest Oyster Open* with multiple celebrity chefs. In addition, for the past three years James and *85 Main* have been a corporate sponsor for the *Relay for Life Survivor Tent*, offering services to the community and sharing his love of healthy food.



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All of this has shaped James' personal culinary style as well as his reputation as a pioneer in his industry. Having his finger on the pulse of what people want, James Martin's talent, passion, and drive have created a dining experience that is definitely more than the sum of its parts.

To see James in action: <http://youtu.be/fYvKZinmcTs>